

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 4742

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SUBJECT: THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS APPARATUS AND PLAYERS IN HANOI

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SUMMARY: THIS MESSAGE REVIEWS THE KEY ROLE WHICH SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF VIET-NAM PLAY IN VIET-NAM'S FOREIGN POLICY DECISIONS. PRIME MINISTER PHAM VAN DONG AND FOREIGN MINISTER NGUYEN DUY TRINH PROVIDE PROBABLY THE GREATEST INPUT INTO THE NORMAL OPERATION OF THE COUNTRY'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS. THE VICE FOREIGN MINISTERS, WHOM WE DESCRIBE BRIEFLY (SEPTEL) ARE ABLE TO PROVIDE AUTHORITATIVE VIEWS TO DIPLOMATS, ALTHOUGH THEIR OWN ABILITY TO TAKE DECISIONS WOULD APPEAR TO BE--IN GENERAL--SEVERELY RESTRICTED. END SUMMARY.

1. INTRODUCTION: AT THIS TIME OF RE-EXAMINATION OF THE AMERICAN-VIETNAMESE RELATIONSHIP, IT MAY BE HELPFUL TO REVIEW THE MANNER IN WHICH THE SRV HANDLES FOREIGN AFFAIRS WITHIN THE PARTY AND THE GOVERNMENT, AS WELL AS TO DESCRIBE THE PLAYERS AND THEIR ROLES, INsofar AS INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE.

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THIS MESSAGE REPRESENTS A COMPILATION OF THE RESULTS OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED OVER A CONSIDERABLE PERIOD OF TIME WITH DIPLOMATS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS CURRENTLY OR PREVIOUSLY ASSIGNED TO HANOI.

2. THE PARTY: THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT AS TO THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF VIET-NAM (CPV), AND PARTICULARLY

ITS POLITBURO, IS SUPREME IN ALL DECISION-MAKING. A DECISION OF ANY BUT THE MOST INSIGNIFICANT NATURE MUST USUALLY RECEIVE POLITBURO CLEARANCE. AS A BODY, IT IS THOUGHT THAT THE POLITBURO DOES NOT MEET VERY OFTEN. IT DOES, HOWEVER, MEET AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE WHEN GROUP CONSULTATION AND DECISION IS DEEMED NECESSARY. ONE FAIRLY WELL ESTABLISHED EXAMPLE OCCURRED IN EARLY AUGUST, 1976, DURING THE VISIT OF THE THAI DELEGATION, HEADED BY THEN FOREIGN MINISTER PHICHAIRATTAKUN, TO NORMALIZE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. THE FIRST DAY'S ENCOUNTER WAS SUFFICIENTLY ACrimonious, ESPECIALLY OVER THE ISSUE OF US PLANES FLOWN TO THAILAND FROM SOUTH VIET-NAM ABOUT THE TIME OF THE FALL OF SAIGON, TO RAISE A QUESTION AS TO WHETHER DISCUSSIONS WOULD COLLAPSE COMPLETELY. THE POLITBURO REPORTEDLY MET IN URGENT, SECRET SESSION AND AGREED TO DROP THE DEMAND FOR THE RETURN OF THE PLANES AND TO ADOPT A MORE CONCILIATORY NEGOTIATING POSTURE WITH THE THAI, RESULTING IN QUITE A DIFFERENT AIR TO THE DISCUSSIONS AT THE NEXT MEETING OF THE TWO SIDES.

3. IT IS SAID THAT AT POLITBURO MEETINGS, IT IS THE IMPORTANT POLITBURO MEMBERS RESIDENT IN HANOI--LE DUAN, TRUONG CHINH, PHAM VAN DONG, LE DUC THO, VO NGUYEN GIAP, NGUYEN DUY TRINH, AND, TO AN EXTENT, PERHAPS LE THANH NGHI--WHO SPEAK OUT ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS QUESTIONS, WITH DONG, THO, AND TRINH PARTICULARLY PROMINENT. GENERAL SECRETARY LE DUAN IS NOT KNOWN TO BECOME PARTICULARLY INVOLVED IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS EXCEPT IN THE BIG QUESTIONS WHICH AFFECT SERIOUSLY THE COURSE THE COUNTRY IS TAKING. TO THE EXTENT THAT ANYONE

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KNOWS ANYTHING ABOUT HIS ROLE, HE IS THOUGHT ONLY TO TAKE PERSONAL INTEREST IN AND CONTROL OVER VIET-NAM'S SENSITIVE RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION AND THE PRC. HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD THE US IS USUALLY BELIEVED TO BE ONE BASED ON PRAGMATISM, ALTHOUGH WE SUSPECT THAT THIS IS SHEER GUESSWORK ON THE PART OF THE SEVERAL OBSERVERS WHO SUGGESTED THIS TO US.

4. XUAN THUY, IN HIS ROLE AS ONE OF THE PARTY SECRETARIES AND AS CHAIRMAN OF THE FOREIGN RELATIONS DEPARTMENT OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE, IS REPORTEDLY QUITE A PROMINENT FIGURE IN COORDINATING WORK ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS ISSUES FOR THE POLITBURO. ONE FORMER ENVOY TO HANOI WHO WAS WELL RECEIVED WHILE THERE CLAIMED THAT ONE OF THUY'S FUNCTIONS IS TO BRIEF INDIVIDUAL POLITBURO MEMBERS ON FOREIGN POLICY QUESTIONS PRIOR TO A MEETING. ANOTHER OBSERVER SUGGESTED THAT THUY'S ROLE IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS WAS NOT AS DEVELOPED AS IT MIGHT BE FOR THE SIMPLE REASON THAT THUY IS AN EXTREMELY BUSY INDIVIDUAL WITHOUT ADEQUATE TIME TO DEVOTE TO THAT

PORTION OF HIS WORK.

5. IF THE POLITBURO DOES NOT MEET VERY OFTEN, THE FULL CENTRAL COMMITTEE APPARENTLY MEETS FAR LESS FREQUENTLY. THE FORMER ENVOY PREDICTED THAT ONLY A MAJOR ISSUE SUCH AS RELATIONS WITH THE US WOULD NECESSITATE A SECRET CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETING. AT SUCH A TIME, XUAN THUY'S ROLE AS COORDINATOR OR BACKSTAGE MANAGER WOULD AGAIN COME INTO PLAY.

6. FOR THE DAILY CONDUCT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, INDIVIDUAL POLITBURO MEMBERS ARE PROBABLY OF GREATEST IMPORTANCE. GENERALIZING, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THERE IS SUCH AN ELEMENT OF TRUST AND INTIMACY AMONG THAT GROUP OF OLD CRONIES THAT, ON MOST ISSUES, SO LONG AS ONE MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO HAS PASSED ON A QUG589,, IT IS CONSIDERED TO HAVE THE PARTY SEAL OF APPROVAL. IN ANY CASE, INDIVIDUAL POLITBURO MEMBERS ARE SAID TO BE IN SUCH FREQUENT CONTACT WITH ONE
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ANOTHER IN HANOI THAT ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT POLICY CAN BE RESOLVED INFORMALLY.

7. EITHER PRIME MINISTER PHAM VAN DONG OR FOREIGN MINISTER NGUYEN DUY TRINH WILL PASS INDIVIDUALLY ON MOST FOREIGN AFFAIRS QUESTIONS. BOTH ARE IN NATURAL POSITIONS TO DO SO, OF COURSE, IN VIEW OF THEIR PARTY AND GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS. ALTHOUGH THE THAI WERE TOLD THAT DONG WAS "OUT OF THE COUNTRY" DURING THEIR AUGUST VISIT, THIS WAS A LINE WHICH IS REPORTEDLY USED FREQUENTLY WITH VISITING DELEGATIONS WHEN DONG DOES NOT WANT TO COMMIT HIS PRESTIGE WITH GROUPS OF MARGINAL IMPORTANCE OR WHILE ISSUES REMAIN UNRESOLVED. HOWEVER, IT WAS BELIEVED IN HANOI AT THE TIME THAT VICE FOREIGN MINISTER PHAN HIEN--THE PRINCIPAL NEGOTIATOR ON THE VIETNAMESE SIDE--WAS MAINTAINING CONSTANT CONTACT WITH DONG AT EVERY STAGE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE THAI. PERHAPS UNLIKE LE DUAN OR TRUONG CHINH, DONG APPEARS TO ENJOY THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS GAME, TO WHICH HE DEVOTES A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF HIS TIME.

8. THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS: LIKE OTHER PARTS OF THE GOVERNMENT (DESCRIBED BY ONE WAG AS A COMBINATION OF THE WORST FEATURES OF THE OLD MANDARIN SYSTEM AND OF FRENCH ADMINISTRATION), THE FOREIGN MINISTRY IS USUALLY CHARACTERIZED BELOW THE VICE MINISTERIAL LEVEL BY IGNORANCE ON THE PART OF ONE OFFICE AS TO WHAT IS HAPPENING IN OTHER OFFICES AND BY EXCESSIVE RELUCTANCE TO TAKE ANY DECISIONS, HOWEVER MINOR. A EUROPEAN DIPLOMAT, FOR EXAMPLE, WILL BE EXPECTED TO HAVE WORKING LEVEL CONTACT AT MFA EXCLUSIVELY WITH THE WESTERN EUROPEAN DEPARTMENT. IF HE ASKS SOMEONE IN THAT DEPARTMENT ABOUT AN ASIAN DEVELOPMENT, HE WILL

USUALLY FIND THAT LURSON NOT CONVERSANT ON THE MATTER.
IF HE TRIES TO SEE SOMEONE IN ONE OF THE ASIAN DEPARTMENTS,
HE WILL LEARN THAT THAT PERSON CANNOT TALK TO HIM
OFFICIALLY BECAUSE HE DEALS ONLY WITH ASIAN DIPLOMATS. IT
IS STRICTLY A CATCH 22 SITUATION.
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10. SO FAR AS IS KNOWN, TRINH DOES NOT GO TO THE MINISTRY
ON EVEN A DAILY BASIS, NOR DOES HE HAVE AN ALTER EGO
(E.G., ONE OF THE VICE MINISTERS OR HIS DIRECTOR OF CABINET)
WHO RUNS THINGS WHILE HE IS AWAY. YET, THERE IS AGREEMENT
THAT TRINH MAINTAINS CONTROL OF THE OPERATION OF THE MINIS-
TRY AND OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN GENERAL BY DINT OF THE NATURE
OF THE SRV SYSTEM: (A) A POLITBURO MEMBER MUST PASS ON MOST
DECISIONS; (B) TRINH IS THE MOST ACCESSIBLE MEMBER TO
MINISTRY PERSONNEL; THEREFORE, (C) THE MAJORITY OF ISSUES
WITH WHICH THEY ARE CONCERNED WILL NATURALLY HAVE TO
COME TO TRINH'S ATTENTION, EITHER DURING HIS VISITS TO
THE MINISTRY OR AT OTHER TIMES (E.G., TELEPHONICALLY), OR
A QUESTION MAY SIMPLY NOT BE DECIDED. A FOREIGN AMBASSADOR
WHO WANTS AN ANSWER MAY ADDRESS HIMSELF TO TRINH, IF HE
CAN FIND HIM. HOWEVER, IF THE ENVOY'S COUNTRY IS IN POLITI-

CAL FAVOR WITH WITH THE SRV, OR IF THE ENVOY HIMSELF IS IN PERSONAL FAVOR, HE WILL SPEAK WITH DONG MORE OFTEN.

11. THE VICE FOREIGN MINISTER. MOST OFTEN, HOWEVER, DIPLOMATS OR INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION PERSONNEL ASSIGNED TO HANOI WHO WANT AUTHORITATIVE VIEWS OR ANSWERS WILL DEAL
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WITH ONE OF THE VICE MINISTERS. IT IS GENERALLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THESE MEN HAVE RELATIVELY LITTLE AUTHORITY OF THEIR OWN, ALTHOUGH THIS VARIES ACCORDING TO THEIR INDIVIDUAL POLITICAL TIES WITH THE PARTY OR, PROBABLY, THE DEGREE OF CONFIDENCE THEIR SUPERIORS PLACE IN THEM. THE MUST (UNDERLINE) CHECK WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER OR OTHER POLITBURO MEMBERS ON ISSUES OF SUBSTANCE. THEIR ROLES IN THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS APPARATUS ARE PRIMARILY AS EXECUTORS (UNDERLINE) OF POLICY.

12. ON DEC 30, 1976, THE MINISTRY SENT A CIRCULAR NOTE TO FOREIGN MISSIONS IN HANOI ADVISING THEM THAT TWO NEW VICE MINISTERS HAD BEEN APPOINTED, HOANG BICH SON AND NGUYEN VAN TIEN. THIS BROUGHT THE NUMBER OF VICE MINISTERS AT MFA UP TO SEVEN, WHICH WOULD SEEM TO BE RATHER HIGH FOR A COUNTRY THE SIZE OF VIET-NAM.

13. IT IS NOT EASY TO DETERMINE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF EACH OF THE SEVEN. AS ONE HANOI-BASED DIPLOMAT REPORTED RECENTLY, HE ASKED THE MINISTRY WHO DOES WHAT AND RECEIVED NO REPLY. OFTEN PERSONS WITH WHOM WE HAVE CONTACT WILL KNOW EITHER PHAN HIEN OR NGUYEN CO THACH, SIMPLE BECAUSE THESE ARE THE TWO WHO DEAL PARTICULARLY WITH NON-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES. NO ONE WHOM WE HAVE INTERVIEWED EVER KNEW ALL SEVEN. BECAUSE THEY ARE SUCH KEY CONTACTS, WITH EACH NORMALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR A PARTICULAR SET OF COUNTRIES, A HEAD OF MISSION BASED IN HANOI IS REQUIRED TO KNOW AT LEAST SEVERAL OF THEM. THEY ARE AUTHORITATIVE, EVEN IF THEY CANNOT OFTEN MAKE DECISIONS. SEPTEL CONTAINS BIO SKETCHES OF THE SEVEN.

14. OTHER PLAYERS IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS: OTHERS BESIDES POLITBURO MEMBERS AND FOREIGN MINISTRY PERSONNEL ENTER THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS SCENE, ALTHOUGH WITH VARYING DEGREES OF ABILITY TO PLAY THE GAME. ONE NAME WHICH OFTEN APPEARS IS THAT OF ELDERLY (74), FORMER MINISTER OF CULTURE HOANG MINH GIAM. IN HIS ROLE AS CHAIRMAN OF THE EXTERNAL RELATIONS
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TIONS COMMISSION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, HE RECEIVES SUCH VISITORS AS THE TWO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT OF NEW ZEALAND WHO WERE IN HANOI IN EARLY FEB. ALTHOUGH AN OLD REVOLUTIONARY, HE IS NOWHERE IN THE CPV POWER STRUCTURE AND THUS, ACCORDING TO ONE OBSERVER, CAN IN NO WAY BE SAID TO PLAY A MEANINGFUL ROLE IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

15. FOREIGN ASSISTANCE PASSES THROUGH THE COMMITTEE FOR THE RECEPTION OF FOREIGN AID, LOCATED IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE RATHER THAN AT MFA. BECAUSE OF HIS LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE STATE PLANNING COMMISSION, VICE PREMIER LE THANH NGHI IS NECESSARILY WELL WIRED INTO QUESTIONS OF AID FROM AND TRADE WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD. THE COMPETENT MINISTER ON AN AID PROJECT ALSO BECOMES INVOLVED, AND NOT NECESSARILY IN LIAISON WITH THE PRIME MINISTER'S FOREIGN AID COMMITTEE. A MINISTER (NON-POLITBURO) CONTACTED ONE AMBASSADOR SEVERAL YEARS AGO WHEN IT APPEARED THAT THE SOVIETS WERE GOING TO PROPOSE AN AID PROGRAM WHICH WOULD HAVE CREATED GREATER SOVIET INVOLVEMENT AND PRESENCE THAN THE VIETNAMESE DESIRED. THE MINISTER ASKED WHETHER THE ENVOY'S NEUTRAL GOVERNMENT COULD UNDERTAKE THE PROJECT, INSTEAD. THE AMBASSADOR INFORMED THE MINISTER AT 4:30 A.M. THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD DO SO, AT WHICH POINT THE MINISTER CALLED LE DUAN DIRECTLY AT THAT HOUR TO INFORM HIM OF THE DETAILS. LE DUAN AGREED TO ACCEPT THE PROPOSAL AND, WHEN THE SOVIETS PRESENTED THEIR OWN LATER THAT MORNING, THE MINISTER WAS ABLE TO INFORM THEM THAT THE GOVERNMENT ALREADY HAD SUCH A PROJECT.

16. COMMENT: ONE THING THAT STRIKES THE OBSERVER IS THAT THERE IS CONSIDERABLE FLEXIBILITY AMONG THE TOP PLAYERS IN AN OTHERWISE RIGID VIETNAMESE BUREAUCRATIC SYSTEM. ONE OR THE OTHER OR ALL OF THE "OLD BOYS" IN THE POLITBURO MAKES THE MEANINGFUL DECISIONS, IT NOT ALWAYS MATTERING WHICH ONE OF THEM DOES SO. MINISTERS MAY BECOME INVOLVED WHO HAVE NO REAL FOREIGN AFFAIRS FUNCTIONS. THE VICE
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FOREIGN MINISTERS ARE RELATIVELY INTERCHANGEABLE. NGUYEN CO THACH NORMALLY HANDLES WESTERN EUROPE, BUT HE REPORTEDLY DROPPED THAT PORTION OF HIS WORK FOR SEVERAL MONTHS TO CONCENTRATE ON PREPARATIONS FOR THE NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE AT COLOMBO LAST AUGUST. PRIOR TO HIS VISITS TO FOUR SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES LAST SUMMER. PHAN HIEN ALSO DISCARDED OTHER PORTIONS OF HIS WORK. IN BOTH CASES, OTHER VICE MINISTERS TOOK UP THE SLACK.

17 OBSERVERS AGREED THAT OLD SCHOOL. REVOLUTIONARY, OR FAMILY TIES HELP TO KEEP THE SYSTEM WORKING. THEY PROVIDE A WAY OF OPERATING IN A GOVERNMENT WITH EXTREMELY VERTICAL

LINES OF AUTHORITY AND GENERAL FEAR OF TAKING DECISIONS.
THEY ALSO SMOOTH THE WAY WITH THE EVER PRESENT, OVERSEEING
PARTY APPARATUS.

18. FOREIGNERS ARE GENERALLY VERY FRUSTRATED IN HANOI,
CLAIMING THAT THEYKNOW AS LITTLE BEING INSIDE VIET-NAM
ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING AS DO PERSONS LIVING OUTSIDE THE
COUNTRY. ONCE IN A WHILE A DIPLOMAT IS ABLE TO OBTAIN AN
AUTHORITATIVE VIEW OR A KEY INSIGHT FROM A VICE FOREIGN
MINISTER OR IS ABLE TO KNOW SOMEONE WHO, BY HIS FUNCTIONS,
HAS LITTLE TO DO WITH FOREIGN AFFAIRS BUT, BY HIS INFORMAL
CONNECTIONS, CAN CONTRIBUTE SOME INTERESTING--AND KNOWLEDGE-
ABLE--VIEWS. IT IS THEN THAT AN ASSIGNMENT TO HANOI
PROVIDES AT LEAST SOME SATISFACTIONS IN AN OTHERWISE
VERY DIFFICULT POSTING.
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